

15 deputies face layoffs in partisan budget battle

By Suzie Rollins Singer

staff writer

About 15 Oakland County Sheriff's patrol officers will be laid off by New Year's Day as a result of the county's adopted 1983 budget.

After two hours of discussion, which included testimony from more than 40 people, the Oakland County Board of Commissioners voted 17-7 to adopt the \$114 million budget.

More than 500 persons attended the meeting.

VOTING AGAINST the budget were seven Democrats: commissioners Dennis Aaron of Oak Park, James Doyon of Madison Heights (whose district includes part of Troy), Betty Fortino of Waterford, Donald Geary of Ferndale, Walter Moore of Pontiac, Lawrence Pernick of Southfield and Hubert Price of Pontiac.

Sheriff Johannes Spreen is a Democrat. The board majority is Republican, as are County Executive Daniel T. Murphy and Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson.

The finance committee recommendation called for eliminating 27 sheriff's deputies position. But due to union "bumping" and outside contracts with townships, only 15 persons will lose their jobs, said Patrick Nowak, deputy county executive.

The layoffs are expected to save the county \$1 million. The 1983 budget allocates \$17.4 million to the sheriff's budget.

'I have stopped the cycle and scooter patrols in subdivisions . . . If you eliminate the deputies, you're inviting an open season on crime.'

— Sheriff Johannes Spreen

"FOR YEARS, people in the south end of the county have had their own police forces and have argued against the existence of a police force (for the north end) paid for by their taxes," Nowak said.

"Police protection in these areas (townships without their own forces) can still be available, but they (townships) will have to pay for it."

The total spending plan for 1983 is only 0.6 percent larger than the 1982 \$110 million budget. Across the county, 96 job slots were eliminated for 1983. During 1982, 41 persons were laid off. The latest rounds of cuts will bring the total for the year to 59 persons laid off. Because many of the job slots are now vacant, actual layoffs will be fewer.

PERSONS OPPOSING the sheriff's department cuts ranged from law enforcement officers to township residents.

They cited rising crime, more drunk drivers on the highways and loss of state and federal aid. Only one man spoke in favor of the cuts.

Sheriff Johannes Spreen appealed to

the board, explaining he would cut programs and practices previously criticized by the commissioners if they would save his deputies.

"I have stopped the cycle and scooter patrols in subdivisions. There will be no more unauthorized overtime or new programs not approved by the board of commissioners," said Spreen, adding:

"If you eliminate the deputies, you're inviting an open season on crime."

REPUBLICAN commissioners refused to join the late-night debate. In past discussions, Republicans have argued that fat cuts the sheriff's budget. In addition, they added 24 persons to the sheriff's department during 1982 — at a cost of \$1 million — to satisfy a court decree.

In a detailed memo, Commissioner John Calandro, R-Northville, said, "The recommended 1983 budget allocates 416 employees to the sheriff's department at an average cost of \$30,631 per employee. This is 7.6 percent higher than the countywide average cost per employee of \$28,459."

State grants will not be lost because of the layoffs, he said. Since the county will continue to sell its services to townships, the county will still be eligible for aid.

"There is also a misconception that the deletion of 20 roving patrol officers will devastate law enforcement capabilities in the county. The actual reduction represents less than 1.5 percent of the total patrol capability in the county," Calandro said.

BEFORE VOTING on the budget, Democratic commissioners proposed 14 amendments to cut other areas rather than the sheriff's department, but only two amendments were adopted.

Commissioners deleted \$5,000 allocated to the county executive's mounted division and \$127,000 from the prosecutor's anti-organized crime strike force, eliminating the positions of three investigators and one secretary.

Other cuts included:

- A senior trial lawyer from the prosecutor's staff, saving \$50,000.

- Twelve persons from the county executive's department.
- 25 previously authorized but currently vacant positions in the drain commissioner's office.

THE 1983 budget keeps the property tax rate of 4.63 mills unchanged.

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— Commissioner John Calandro

The property tax levy continues to be the county's biggest source of money. It raises 58 percent — \$66.2 million.

A \$4.4 million surplus was carried forward from prior years and added to the 1983 budget.

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Charity caseloads down despite recession - prof

While Michigan lingers in economic crisis and unemployment creeps higher, caseloads in private social service agencies are down, reports a Michigan State University professor.

"It's a very unique phenomenon," said John Herrick, a professor in MSU's School of Social Work. "The very time you'd expect distressed people to be knocking down the doors of these private agencies, they're not doing it."

Herrick, who is researching the impact of Reaganomics on the private social service system in Michigan, said conditions have created a new clientele of middle-class people who are unemployed and in financial crisis for the first time.

These "new poor," Herrick points out, may not be aware private agencies exist, or they may not have enough money to pay for minimal aid, or they may be reluctant to seek out services because of the stigma attached to asking for help.

"IN OUR society, there's always been a notion that people who ask for help are somehow not normal," said Herrick. "The assumption is that if you accept welfare assistance, it's your

own fault and it's the easy way out."

Herrick said that because of the strength of the American work ethic and the welfare stigma, millions of people who need aid to survive are not getting it.

"This is particularly true of the aged," he said. "They feel terribly guilty about not being able to provide for themselves. They won't even accept food stamps because they feel it's a handout, so they suffer instead."

Herrick said social service agencies should make certain that people in their community know what services the agencies provide, and that newspapers as well as television and radio stations have a public service obligation to air outreach statements.

"Traditionally," he said, "the demand for agency services has been self-generated — people always came to them. But now it's absolutely imperative they open their doors to the community and let everyone know what they're all about."

"People have to press for changes again now and let the government know they're desperate for relief from poverty and stress."

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